

## Frequently Asked Questions About Mourning Doves

### *Why does the adult dove never leave the nest? Will it starve to death?*

No, the adults will not starve. Both the female and male dove incubate the eggs and feed the nestlings. The female typically sits on the nest for long periods during the day and the male picks up the incubation duties at night. The switch between the two may be a quick one, giving the appearance that the same bird never leaves the nest. Male doves have iridescent feathers on their necks, so by looking carefully you might actually see that both sexes are involved with incubation.

### *How long does it take a mourning dove to raise its young?*

Mourning doves begin nesting by early March and may continue through September, sometimes raising as many as 4 to 5 different broods of young in a year. Adult doves incubate their clutch, usually 2 eggs but sometimes 1 or 3, for about 14 days before they hatch. Then, the newly hatched nestlings take about 14 days to fledge (leave the nest). Adult doves feed their young a milky substance, called "crop milk", sloughed from the lining of their crops. The *crop* is the first part of the digestive system, after the lining of the mouth.

### *What do I do if I find a young dove on the ground?*

Many birds that appear to be nestlings actually are fledglings, which have left the nest on their own. The nest is a dangerous place and birds leave it as soon as they can. It's best to first assume the young bird is out of the nest by choice. Find a location away from the young bird and observe for an hour or two. If you don't see any signs of the adults by then, it may be a fallen nestling. If a young bird has fallen from a nest, it can be gently replaced. Remove any threat to the animal by relocating pets indoors and keeping children away. If the bird appears injured or you think it has been abandoned, contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area. You can find a list of them on the NC Wildlife Resources Commission web page at [www.wildlife.state.nc.us/](http://www.wildlife.state.nc.us/)